

**Sellardore Tales**

**Zorin**

**The Curse of Sellardore**

*Ocean Prince*  
Written by Marshal Anderson  
Illustrated by Nicholas Marangos

**SHERSTON SOFTWARE**



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## Chapter 1

Soolin, Darvid and Tem stood at the front of the boat as it headed towards the port at Sellardore. They were looking forward to exploring a new land and wondered what adventures it might hold for them. They could see rows of small white washed houses with slate roofs along the sea wall. People were moving about, busy at their jobs, working hard.

Working hard was not what the three adventurers had in mind for their first day in Sellardore. They wanted just to look around and find somewhere to stay, eat and rest.

In no time the boatman was shouting at them, "Come on you lot, I haven't got all day, get moving!" They left the boat and, carrying all their belongings in the packs on their backs, stepped onto the cobbled streets. Before they had time to do anything a ragged group formed around them, all trying to sell them things.

"A wand from the magic thorn tree of Hell Deeps, only one gold piece," said one.

"Gold dust from the Ork mines," offered another.

"A fine healing spell made by elves," said yet another.

Tem was laughing and Darvid had a grin from ear to ear, but Soolin watched. A bony hand was reaching into the pocket of Tem's leather coat, quickly it took out a draw string purse. The robber didn't know that the purse was all Tem had in the world and didn't care. These strangers were easy targets. If the robber had been watching he might just have seen the glint of the sun on Soolin's dagger, but the blade was pressed to his throat before he knew what was happening.

"Now, just put it back, that's it, nice and easy, then we'll all be happy," said Soolin, in a voice like ice.

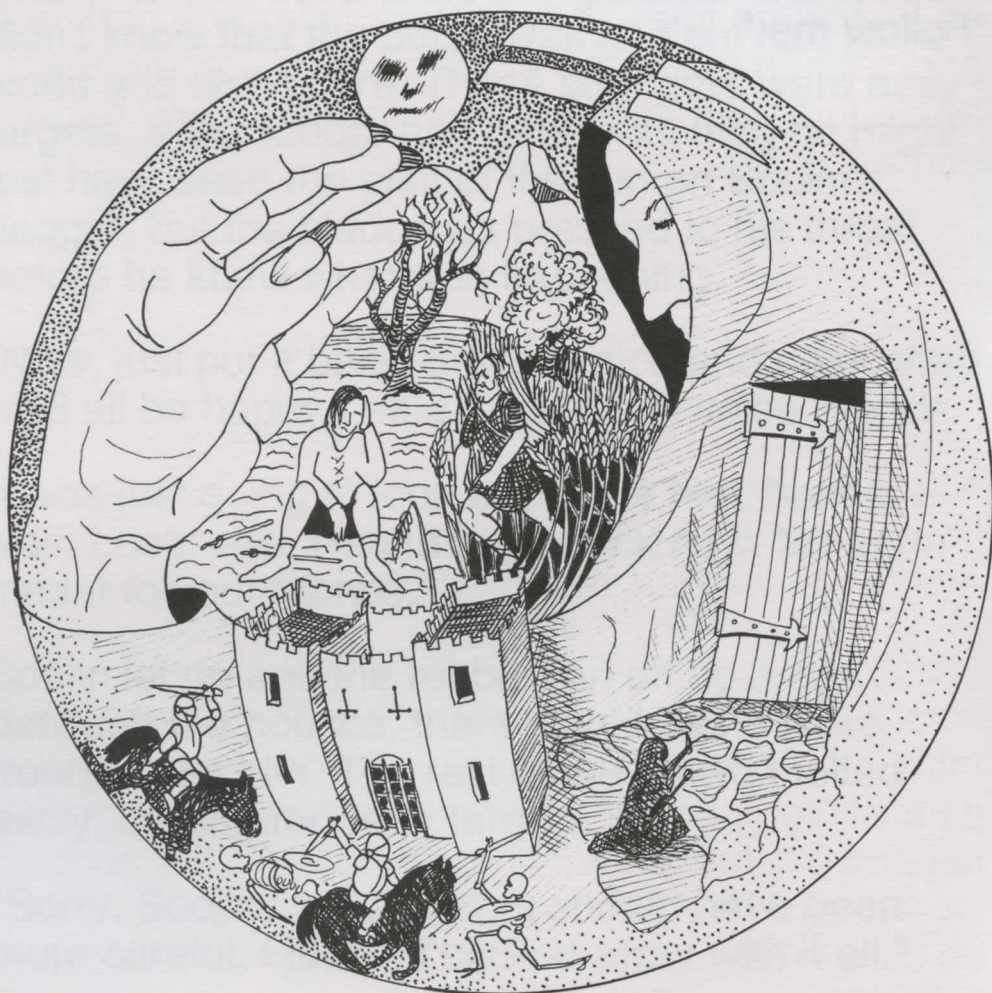
"I was just going to look after it for him, honest I was. Look, see, I'm putting it back now. No harm meant to your friends."

Soolin let go and the robber ran off up a gap between the houses, there would be no more trouble from him. The rest of the crowd melted away, looking for other targets.

"Sorry, Soolin," said Tem, "I should have been more careful, I just got carried away with it all."

"I know," said Soolin, "just don't expect me to watch your back all the time. There will be more adventures yet, try to live long enough to be part of them."

Soolin placed the dagger back in her belt and turned towards the town. She found herself facing an old man in a grey cloak. The lines on his face told many stories but he spoke only two words; "Follow me."



## Chapter 2

The man in the cloak spoke in such a soft but powerful voice that they found themselves doing as they were told. They followed him to a dark inn and sat in a quiet corner. They listened carefully as he told them the history of the land they had come to.

"Many years ago, when the land was young, this was a happy place. Crops grew well and the Earth was kind to us. Then things started to go wrong. At first we thought it was just bad luck as our wells began to run dry and our crops did not grow. But winter became longer and our people became sad. Many left to seek their fortunes in other lands, and those who stayed became ill and weak."

"Then we found the cause of all our problems. It was Zorin, the evil wizard of Gothar. He was taking the power of good from the land and using it for all sorts of bad deeds. We knew that if we let his power grow he would destroy us in the end, so we attacked his castle in the mountains. Many of us died in that battle as he used strong magic to make an army of the dead. We beat his army and drove him from the castle, but we could not destroy him."

"We left one of our own wizards in the castle to

stop him coming back, and now we look for Zorin everywhere. We know he fled into the Ork mines at first, taking with him his Wand of Command, but he was seen leaving the mines without it. This wand makes his power much greater. He must have lost or hidden it somewhere in the mines, and be waiting for a chance to come back and get it."

"The mines are defended by the Old Magic left by the Orks; it stops anyone born in Sellardore entering. But you are strangers, you might be able to get in and find the wand before Zorin comes back. We will pay you well if you bring it to us."

The three friends looked at each other. This was why they had come, to seek adventure and fortune. They did not think they would find it so quickly.

Darvid faced the old man. "And just who are you?" he asked.

"I am Arcorn, head of the Seekers, we must destroy Zorin and you must help. Sleep well tonight and I will meet you by the Northern Gate at sunrise."

With that Arcorn left. Soolin turned to Darvid. "Do you trust him?" she asked.

"It's hard to say," Darvid replied. "How could we know anything about him? I don't think it would be a good idea to ask anyone else. Zorin could still have spies here and talking to one of them could make this a very short adventure."

"I agree," said Tem, "we probably can't trust anyone here. I think we should do as he asks, but I think we need to take a lot of care."

"All right, we go," said Soolin, "but let's try to stay alive!"



## Chapter 3

The sky was grey, and the sun had not come up over the dark mountains behind Sellardore when Tem, Soolin and Darvid came to the Northern Gate. Arcorn was waiting for them. He had with him a donkey loaded down with bags.

"Good," said Arcorn, "I knew you would come. You have no time to waste for we have no way of knowing when Zorin will come back. Follow the path north into the mountains. The track will end at the Great Doors to the Ork Mines. I have loaded this donkey with food and the tools that you might need. Which of you is the best fighter?"

"I am," said Darvid.

"Then you shall take this sword. It is the old sword of our fathers and will cut through metal armour. And which of you knows the ways of magic?"

"I know nothing," said Soolin, "but Tem has helped us out of a few tight spots with his skills in magic."

"Oh dear," said Tem, "I'm really not very good at it. I only know the spells my grandmother gave me."

"That will have to do," said Arcorn, sounding a little angry. "You will find magic things in the red

bag. And what do you do, Soolin?"

"I'm pretty good at locks and traps," she replied.

"Then you will find all you need in the green bag. You must go now. Good luck! Remember, Zorin has many spies, so you must tell no one about this quest. When you find the Wand of Command you must bring it to me only."

With that Arcorn left them alone.

Darvid swung his new sword and cut the tops off a few bushes. Then he walked over to an old broken wagon wheel by the road side and swung at that. The iron rim of the wheel fell in two. Pleased, Darvid put the sword into his belt.

Tem looked in the red bag. It held powders and small bottles as well as a strange red candle. He understood some of the labels on the bottles, but he had never seen such an odd candle. He took it out of the bag and held it up, looking at it closely to see if there was any writing on it.

"That's dynamite," said Darvid.

Tem had heard of dynamite. He dropped it and dived behind a rock. Soolin and Darvid laughed.

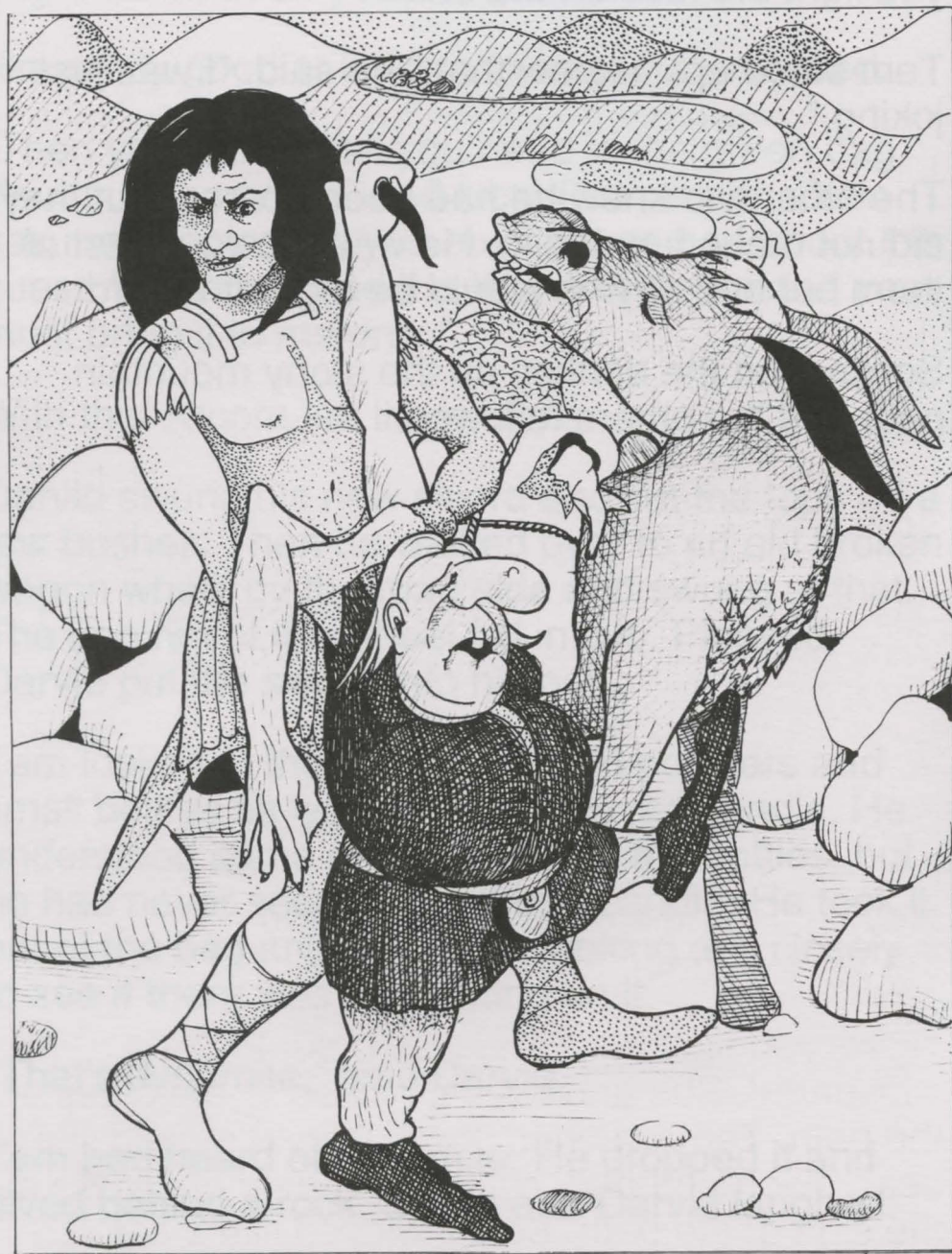
"It's okay," said Darvid, "it won't explode unless

you light the fuse on the end."

Tem stood up. "I knew that," he said. "I was just joking."

The other two knew he had been scared, but they did not make fun of him. He was the youngest of them but one day he would be a great wizard.

Soolin lead the donkey up the stony mountain path and the others followed.



## Chapter 4.

It was a long steep climb up the mountain side, and the three became tired as the sun rose high in the sky.

"Feels like lunch time to me," said Darvid. "Let's rest and eat." They sat down with their backs to the hard grey stone of the mountain and looked back at the town. They could see it all just as if it was a map. Tiny ships sailed out over the sea and the streets were full of moving dots like ants. Above them the mountain seemed to rise for ever.

"We must try to get to the Great Doors before dark," said Darvid.

"Listen!" Soolin hissed. They all became perfectly still. There was a scraping noise a little further up the path. It stopped, and then started again to the left of them. Tem thought he saw something moving behind a rock. Suddenly the noise was to the right of them.

"Tem, you stay here and watch our things," Soolin whispered. She and Darvid moved to the sides of the path. Tem watched them. Darvid moved like a bear, sword in hand, clambering over the rocks at the side of the path. Soolin moved like a cat, slowly and silently. They both disappeared

behind the rocks.

Suddenly there was a noise behind Tem. He looked round and saw two short legs behind the donkey. Carefully he crept round to see what was happening. An Ork, the shortest Ork he had ever seen, was pulling the bags open and muttering to itself, "Food, food they must have. Where is food?"

Tem took his dagger from his belt and crept up behind the creature.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked the Ork.

Without a word it turned and ran, straight into Darvid. Darvid grabbed it by the arms, but found it difficult to hang on to the struggling creature.

It yelled at him, "Let go, let go! Big man not hurt Sneck. Sneck only look for food. Sneck starving."

"Well, Sneck," said Darvid, "you are the fattest starving Ork I've ever seen."

It was true. Sneck might have been short but was almost round. Soolin arrived and looked at the Ork. It just about came up to Darvid's elbow and wore a very tatty black leather shirt. Its legs were short and hairy and partly covered by a ragged

leather kilt.

"What was it doing?" asked Soolin.

Sneck shouted, "Sneck not it, Sneck she. Sneck want food, starving." Sneck stopped trying to get away from Darvid and started to sob. "Sneck alone, no mother, no father, no brother or sister. All gone. Gone away long ago. Leave Sneck, run from Zorin."

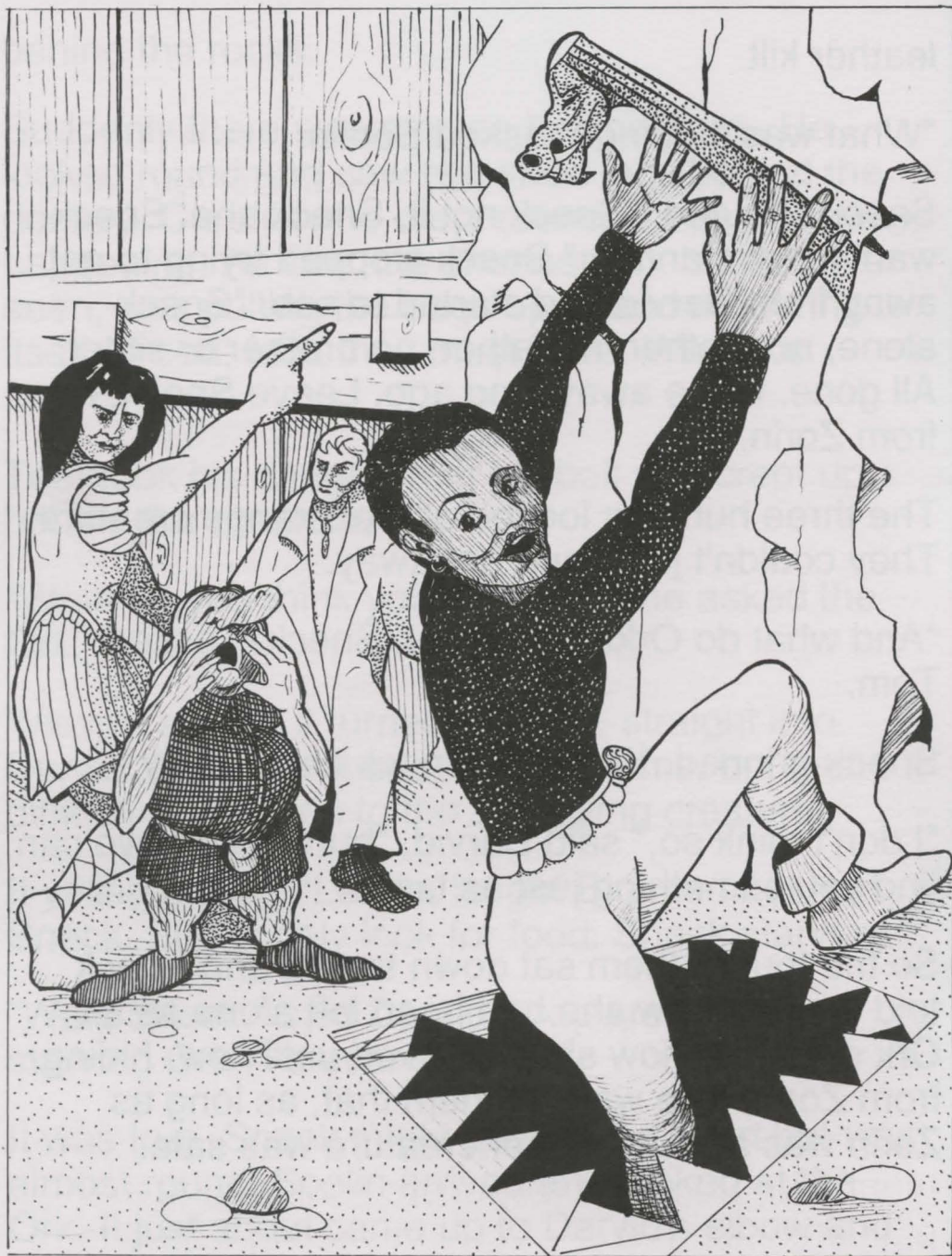
The three humans looked at the strange creature. They couldn't just send her away.

"And what do Orks like to eat, Sneck?" asked Tem.

Sneck grinned. "Donkey. Sneck eat donkey."

"I don't think so," said Darvid, "but I'm sure we can find you something just as tasty."

So the four of them sat down to eat, and Sneck told them of how she had been left alone as an Ork child and how she had lived until now, hiding from Zorin. She warned them that, as long as Zorin was alive, no other creature was safe.



## Chapter 5

"Time to move on then," said Darvid standing up and stretching. "Sneck," he asked, "do you know how far it is to the Great Doors of the Ork Mines?"

"Much climbing yet," she replied. "Why you go there?"

Tem told her of their meeting with Arcorn and the task he had set. Sneck look puzzled. She said that she often wandered into the town at night and heard the humans talk, but she had never heard of Arcorn.

"I expect they are careful of what they say in case any of Zorin's spies are about," said Soolin, but what Sneck had said worried her. "Have you ever been in the mines, Sneck?" she asked.

"Sneck not go there, no food in mines. No one go to the mines now. Shut tight are the Great Doors."

"I'm sure we'll find a way in," said Darvid. "Come on, let's get going."

They loaded up the donkey and headed on up the mountain. Soon the air became colder and the path steeper. The donkey was finding it hard to make its way on the narrow, stony path. As they moved on they finally saw the Great Doors in front

of them.

"Not far now," said Tem.

"Far, is still far," said Sneck. "Great Doors very great, only look close."

She was right. For an hour they climbed and the Great Doors grew bigger and bigger. When, at last, they came to them they were facing two solid wooden doors that rose above their heads as high as twenty humans.

"These must have been made by giants!" said Tem.

"Right, giants," Sneck told them. "Long ago when land was new, giants there were. Helped Orks they did. Much gold in mines then. Needed strong doors to keep humans out."

Arcorn had told them that the magic defending the mines would stop only those born in Sellardore getting in. But none of them could see how to move the heavy doors, even if they were unlocked.

"Let's start with the magic we do know," said Soolin. Tem walked towards the doors. There were no marks on them as far as he could see. He cast several spells that he remembered had

opened doors before, but none of them worked.

"Perhaps we should try knocking," Tem said. He knocked on the door with his fist but nothing happened.

"There has to be a simple way," said Darvid.

"There is no keyhole, no bolts, no handle and the doors are too heavy to push anyway. But Orks used these doors for years so there has to be a way. LET US IN!" he shouted.

Soolin had been looking around the cliff at the side of the doors. She gave a shout and the others ran over to her. "Look," she said, "there's a lever in the wall."

"Then what are we waiting for?" asked Darvid.

"Pull it!"

Sneck started to shout a warning, but it was too late. The ground opened up under Soolin's feet and she was gone.



## Chapter 6

Tem, Darvid and Sneck looked down into the inky blackness after Soolin.

"Do you think she's hurt?" asked Tem.

"How should I know?" snapped Darvid. He was angry at making such a silly mistake. They should have been more careful. "Quick, get a rope from the donkey; we'll see if we can climb down after her."

But even as he spoke the ground closed again. Tem stood with his feet each side of where the hole had been and pulled the lever again, but this time nothing happened. Darvid ran to the middle of the doors and kicked them. He felt better.

"I don't think that will help," said Tem, but he was wrong.

"Look Tem, Sneck, there's strange writing here on the stone in front of the doors," said Darvid. They brushed the stone clear.

"I can read that," Sneck said, "that's Orkish. It says 'When two move as one we shall open.' What does that mean?"

"How should I know?" said Tem. He had

wandered to the other side of the doors. Suddenly he shouted, "That's it, look, there's another lever. We must pull them both at once."

"Good," said Darvid, "but this time we won't take any risks."

A little while later Tem and Darvid stood at the levers. Each had a rope tied round his waist and Sneck held the other end of both.

"Are you sure you can hold us, Sneck?" asked Darvid.

"Not worry. The levers you pull. We save Soolin. Hurry!"

"Ready Tem? Then pull!"

There was a grinding of stone and wood. The doors sounded as if they had not opened in a long time; but they were opening now. Behind them, all they could see was darkness. It seemed that sunlight could not enter the mines.

"Get the equipment Tem," said Darvid.

As soon as Tem let go of the lever, the doors started to close again. Tem ran and grabbed everything he could from the donkey.

"Run!" shouted Darvid as the three of them dived

through the small gap left between the closing doors. Then they stood in darkness.

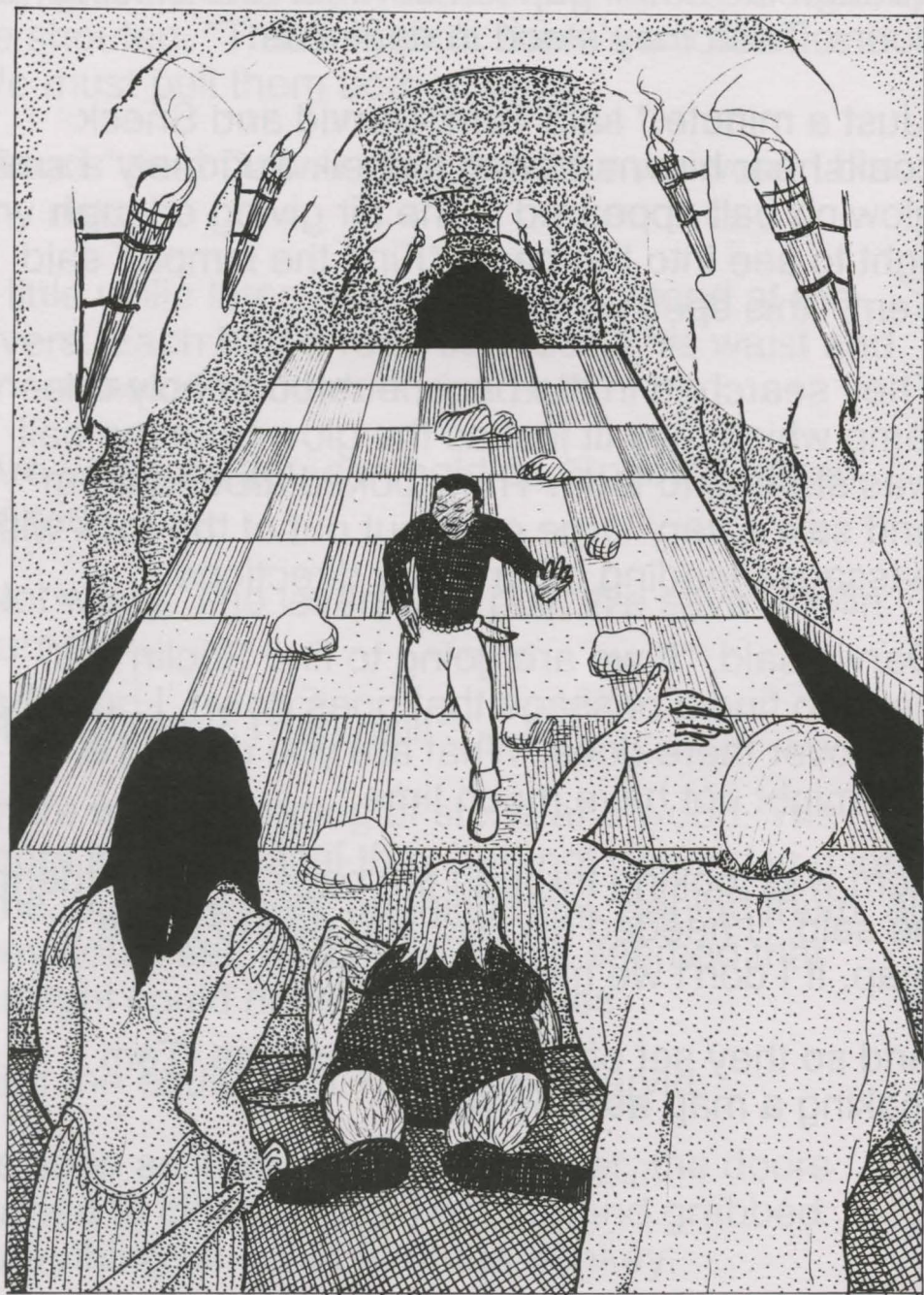
"Just a minute," said Tem. Darvid and Sneck could hear him muttering a spell. Suddenly a small glowing ball appeared in the air giving enough light to see into the bags. "Find the lamps," said Tem, "this spell won't last long."

They searched in the bags, but found only one lamp which they lit just as the glow from the ball was starting to fade. They looked around them and saw a very large cave cut out of the rock with passages leading off in many directions.

Darvid said, "If we are going to find Soolin we need to find a passage that goes down. Look, that one over there does. What are you doing Tem? We might not have much time."

Tem was looking through the bags. "Found them," he said. "I needed my pad and pen to make a map. If I don't we might get lost."

And so they set off down the passage, Tem making a map as they went.



## Chapter 7

They wandered for hours through the maze of passages, stopping here and there for Tem to make his map and to call out for Soolin. Suddenly Darvid told them to stop.

"Listen," he said. Soolin's voice drifted up from the passage ahead of them and they hurried on.

Soon they found her. She was standing a little way in front of them. Darvid began to run.

"Stop!" she shouted. "Look at the floor." Darvid looked. He could just make out a line running across the passage in front of him. He got down on his knees and tested the floor with his hand. It tilted smoothly and anyone who tried to walk on it would slide down to whatever lay under it.

"Balance it, you need balance," said Sneck.

"What are you talking about?" snapped Darvid.

"I see what she means," said Tem. "When this end goes down, Soolin's end goes up. There must be something holding it up in the middle. As long as we keep it balanced it won't tilt. Soolin, are there loose rocks on your side?"

"Yes."

"Start piling them onto the tilting floor. We will do the same at this end. You need enough to balance your own weight"

Darvid still didn't understand but he helped all the same.

Carefully they put rocks at each end of the tilting floor, making sure it stayed balanced, until Tem said there were enough. Then he made another pile next to the end of the tilting floor.

"Right, Soolin, put your foot on the floor and slowly move onto it." said Tem. Soolin moved onto the floor and felt it give under her feet but the others were quick to use the extra rocks to balance her weight.

As Soolin moved, inch by inch, towards the centre of the floor it began to tip down at Tem's end. He carefully took rocks off to keep the balance and soon she was past the middle.

Suddenly Tem lost his grip on a large rock and it fell back onto the floor making it tilt down. Everything happened at once. The rocks at Tem's end slid off into the blackness below and the rocks at the other end began to slide down towards Soolin. The floor tilted steeper and steeper.

"Run, Soolin, run!"

She didn't need to be told. She ran down the sloping floor and jumped for her life.

To Soolin everything seemed to happen very slowly. She was flying through the air and could see the others looking down at her. As she stretched out to grab the ledge she knew she could not reach it, and she crashed into the solid rock below. There was nothing to hold onto.

Then she felt a powerful grip on her arm. She was not falling, she was being pulled up by Sneck's long, hairy Ork arm.



## Chapter 8

It took some time for Soolin to finish thanking Sneck for saving her life.

"Was easy for Sneck, you give Sneck donkey to eat now?"

The three humans looked at each other. It was difficult to understand the ways of other creatures. They supposed that some of the things they did must seem very odd to Sneck. Darvid said that she couldn't have the donkey, but that she would get her share of the reward for the wand.

"Then Sneck buy many donkeys."

Darvid replied, "Do what you want, just don't tell us about it."

Sneck was upset. "You eat pig, cow, chicken. Why not Sneck eat donkey?"

"Sneck, if you want donkey pie then that's what you shall have," said Soolin, "but we like our own donkey so you will have to find another. Right now we need to find the wand and get out of here so let's move on."

They followed Tem's map back up to the doors. Darvid looked carefully but there seemed to be no

way of opening them from inside. "There must be another way out. First we have to find the wand, but how will we do that in all these passages?"

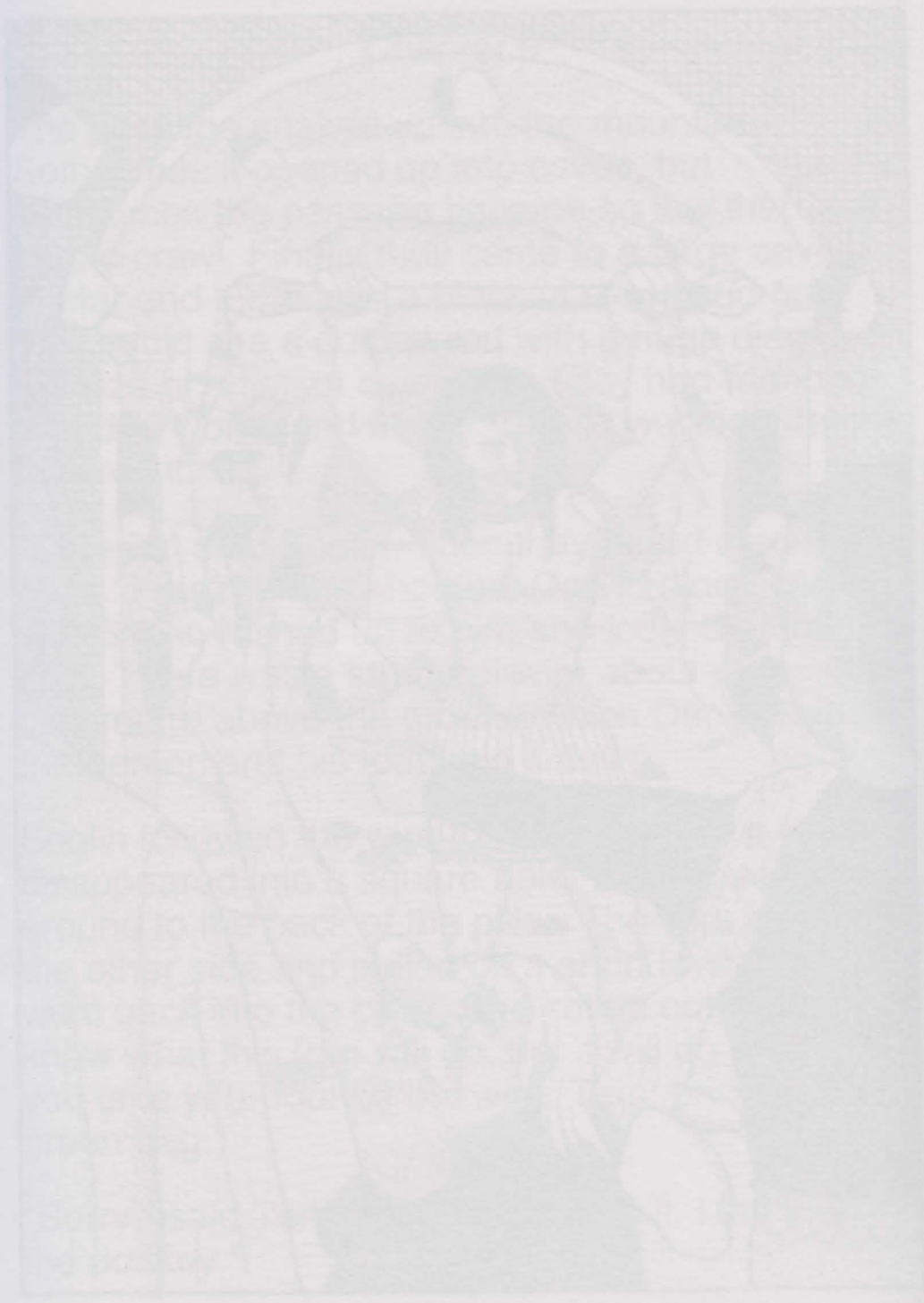
"I think I can help," said Tem. "Put the lamp out when I say." He searched in the bag Arcorn had given him and took out a bottle of red powder. He muttered some magic words and threw the powder in the air. "Put the lamp out now."

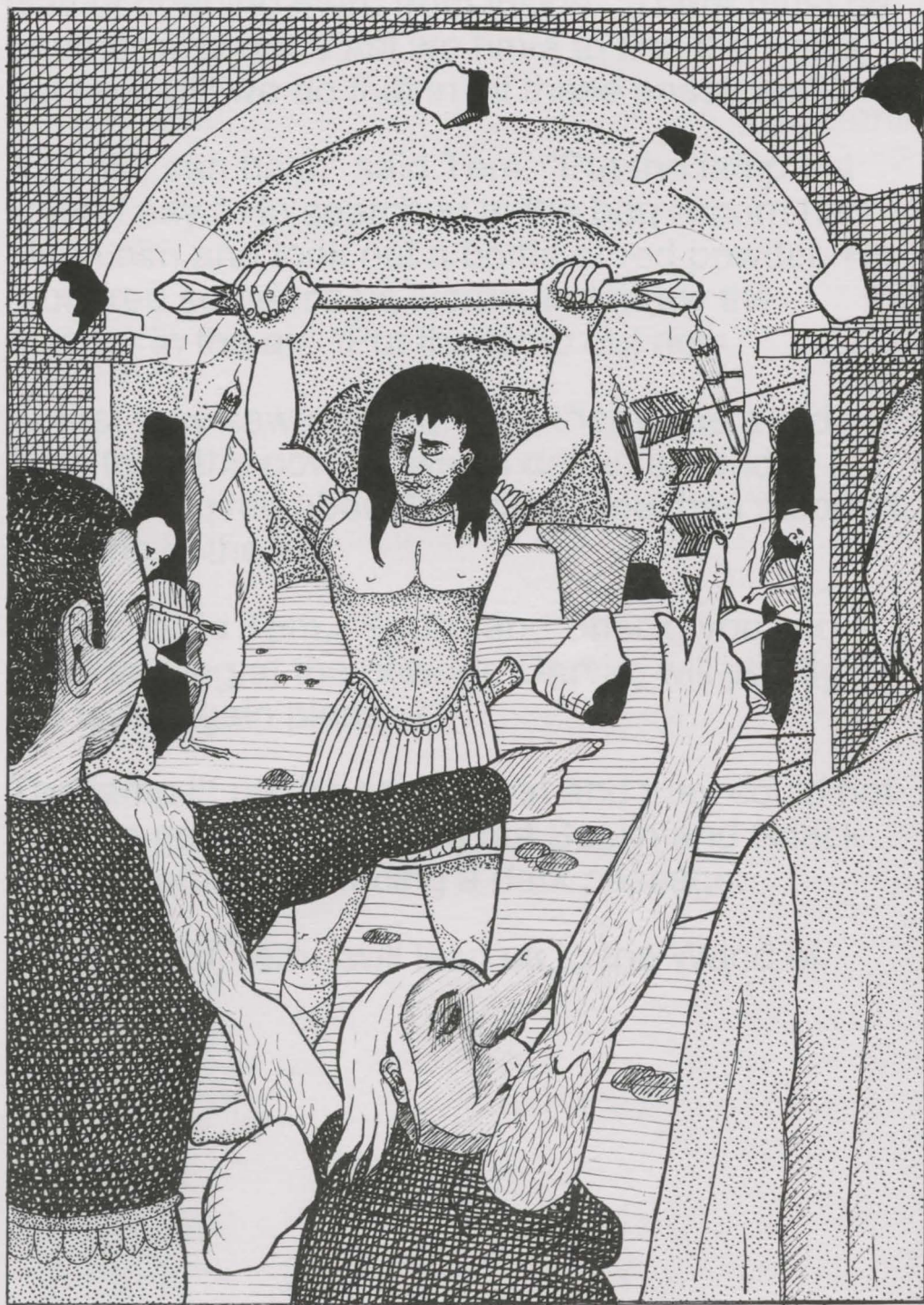
At first they saw nothing, then there was a red glow from the powder which drifted around in a cloud. It moved about for some time then stopped, hanging in the air.

"Right," said Tem, "Soolin and Sneck, you two keep looking at the powder. Darvid, will you light the lamp again please?"

The lamp lit up the cave again and they could not see the powder any more but Soolin and Sneck found themselves facing a dark passage.

"That," said Tem, "will lead us to the Wand of Command."





## Chapter 9

The passage snaked up into the mountain. Sometimes it opened up into caves, but sometimes the passage became so low that they had to crawl. Finally they came to a large cave. At the far end there was a block of stone and on it they could see a golden rod with a huge diamond the size of a fist, at each end. They had found the Wand of Command at last. Darvid walked straight towards it.

"Careful," said Soolin. Then they heard a soft click. "Freeze!" she shouted. Darvid stood very still. Soolin rushed up to him and looked at the floor. There was a strand of wire about one centimetre above the ground which Darvid had trodden on and his foot held it down.

Soolin followed the wire to a pillar where it disappeared into a square hole. She moved around to the back of the pillar. The wire came out the other side and pulled on a short lever that went back into the pillar. She called out, "I don't know what this trap will do, but it will do it when you take your foot off the wire. Tem, bring the green bag."

"Sorry," said Tem, "but I don't have it. I left it on the donkey."

"All right, don't worry." She stopped to think. "Darvid, when I tell you, lift your foot just a little." She pushed down on the lever with her thumb. "Right, lift." Soolin felt the lever move up, it was too strong for her to hold down. "Right, put your foot back down. Tem, Sneck, find me a small rock shaped like a wedge."

They hunted around and found a few such rocks and took them to Soolin. She tried them in the hole until she found one that fitted. She picked up a stone and hammered it into the hole. "Now, Darvid, I've jammed the wire but it probably won't hold for more than a few seconds. When you're ready, jump off the wire and get out of the way."

Darvid jumped and threw himself to the floor. A second later the rock shot out of the hole and the lever clicked up. A dozen arrows flew out of the pillar and hit the wall on the other side. If Darvid had still been standing there he would have been hit by every one of them.

Sneck clapped. "Clever, clever."

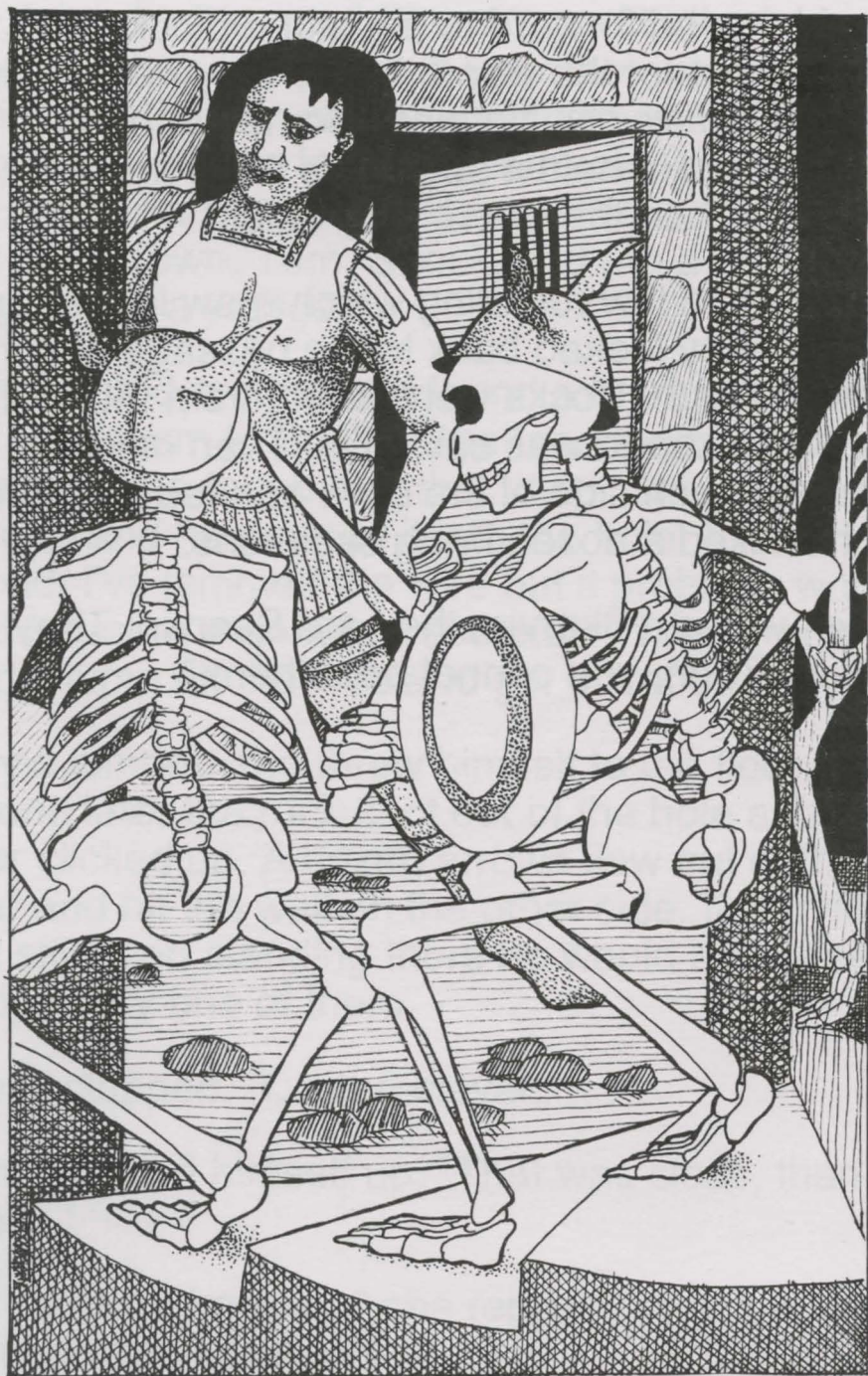
Darvid picked himself up. "That was close, thanks Soolin."

"It's what I'm here for," she replied. "Now get the wand and go carefully!"

Darvid moved forward to the stone block and reached out for the wand. It was very heavy. He picked it up slowly. Nothing seemed to be happening. He held it above his head and they all cheered. Then they went very quiet.

There was a low rumbling which grew louder and louder. They looked back to the passage they had come through. Rocks were falling from the roof and the passage was caving in. Then hidden doors on each side of the cave opened and from each walked a dozen living skeletons.

Sneck yelled, "Skarvin, they are Skarvin. They fight for Zorin, you cannot beat them."



## Chapter 10

"Quickly!" shouted Darvid. "Behind the block." They ran behind the block of stone. "Look, it's hollow, there are steps. Run!" Darvid went last and the Skarvin followed.

They ran down the narrow steps and found themselves in a corridor with cells off each side. The cells on one side were dark but on the other they could see daylight shining. Tem ran into one of the cells. He found a window, too small to get through, but outside he could see a river valley. The wall of the cell was made of bricks.

Sneck said "Skarvin cannot leave mountain, we get out, we safe."

"Right. Darvid, hold the Skarvin off as long as you can, I've got an idea," said Tem.

Darvid ran back to the steps. Because they were narrow the Skarvin were coming down one at a time and so Darvid only needed to fight the first. The creature used its sword well, and when Darvid could get through its defence there was nothing to hit. He could do no more than keep it on the steps.

Tem was taking the dynamite out of his bag. "Do you know how to use that?" Soolin asked.

"No, do you?" he replied. He was chipping at the cell's outer wall with a stone. The mortar between the bricks was loose and he had soon made a slot to push the dynamite into. He lit the fuse which hissed and crackled. "Everyone out!" he shouted. They ran out of the cell and slammed the door.

"Get down!" shouted Tem. The noise was ear-shattering. The door of the cell blew into the corridor and the whole place shook. Darvid found himself under a pile of Skarvin and pulled himself out.

They all ran into what was left of the cell, the outer wall was gone and the river valley stretched out in front of them. "Let's go," said Tem. The Skarvin were beginning to sort themselves out and head for the cell.

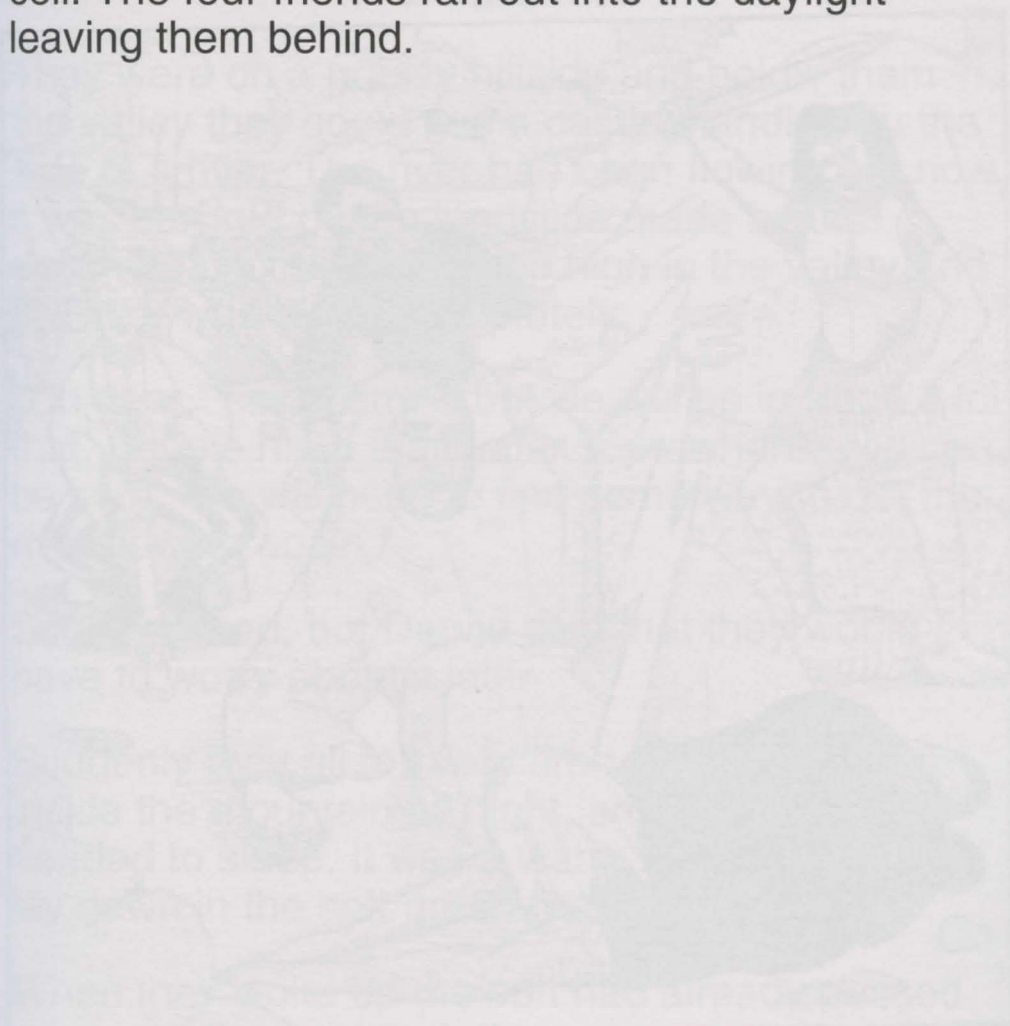
"Wait!" shouted Darvid. The whole mountain shook as if it was alive. Then huge boulders crashed down past the opening and on into the valley.

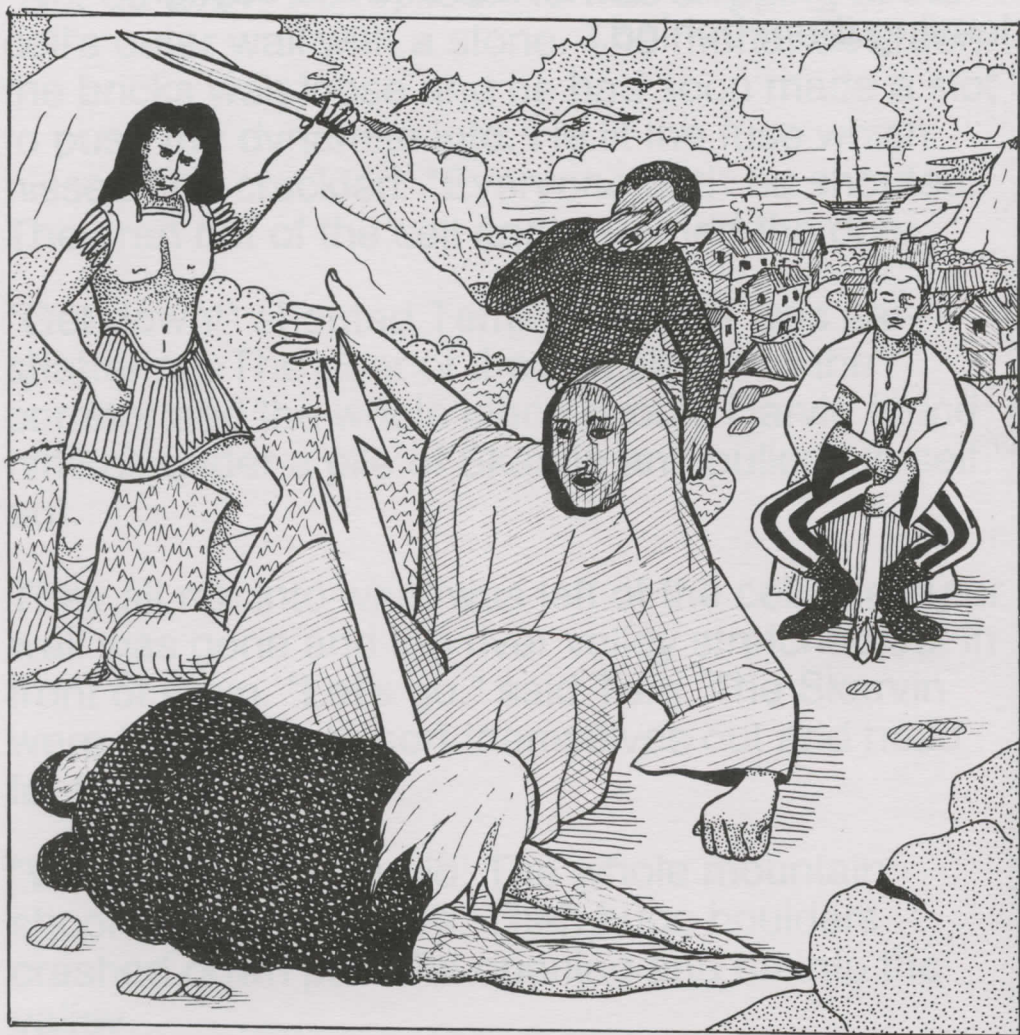
"We've started a landslide," said Soolin. "I hope there was nobody down there."

"I didn't see anyone," said Tem.

The landslide stopped as the Skarvin reached the

cell. The four friends ran out into the daylight leaving them behind.





## Chapter 11

They were on a grassy hillside and below them in the valley they could see a castle standing by the side of a river. The river had been flowing but now it was blocked by the landslide made by the dynamite. Rocks were piled high in the valley and the river was cut off completely.

"Oh dear," said Tem. "I bet we will be in trouble for that. People need that water somewhere, you can be sure. We will need to find some way to get the river flowing again."

Soolin agreed, but Darvid said that they would have to worry about it later.

Suddenly they all felt very tired. They had been inside the mountain all night, and now they needed to sleep. It was a warm morning and they lay down in the soft green grass to rest.

When they woke up the sun had already passed noon and they got their things together. Darvid wrapped the Wand of Command in one of the bags they still had, and slung it over his shoulder. He was sure it was not a good idea to be seen carrying it around.

They marched round the mountain until they came to the Great Doors. The donkey was pleased to

see them because they had left him tied up and he was hungry.

The sun was heading towards the mountains as they moved off down the mountain path. It was much easier going down than it had been climbing up, and in the last light of the day they reached the Northern Gate. Arcorn was waiting for them.

"How did you know we were coming?" asked Tem.

"I know many things. You have the wand?"

"Yes." said Darvid, "here it is." He began to unwrap the bag.

"Stop, stop. No give. Zorin, Zorin, Zorin!" Sneck was shouting and leaping up and down.

Darvid stopped. "Where?" He looked around. He could not see anyone else.

Sneck was pointing at Arcorn. "He Zorin. This human is Zorin."

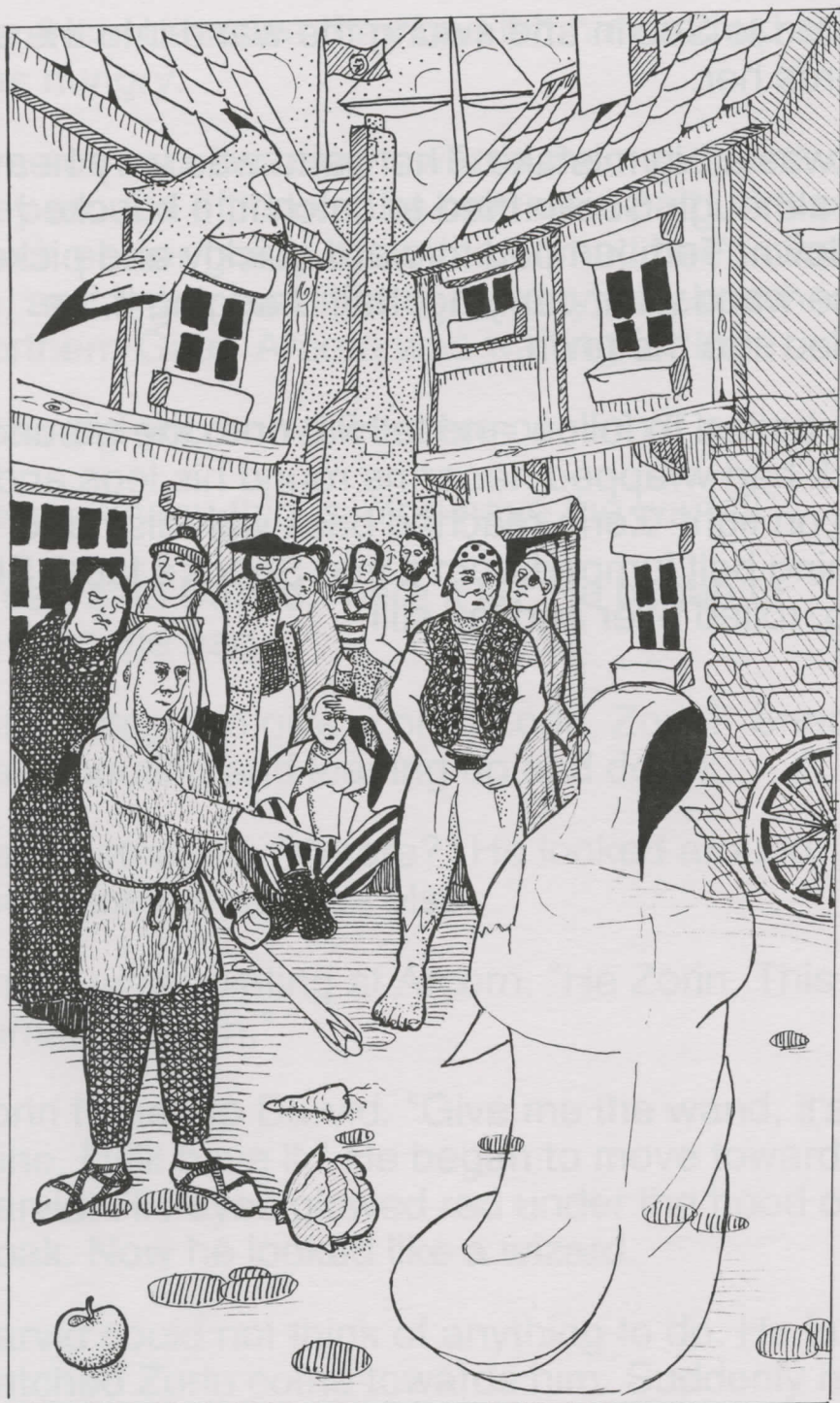
Zorin turned to Darvid. "Give me the wand, it's mine, I will have it." He began to move towards Darvid. His eyes glowed red under the hood of his cloak. Now he looked like a wizard.

Darvid could not think of anything to do. He just watched Zorin come towards him. Suddenly he

shouted to Soolin and swung the wand into the air towards her.

This was a big mistake. The wand was very heavy and, although Soolin tried to catch it, it knocked her down. Tem jumped forward quickly and picked up the wand. Half carrying, half dragging it, he headed into the town.

Zorin turned to follow and fell flat onto the ground. Sneck had wrapped her arms round his legs and hung on tight. Zorin reached back with his hand. A lightning bolt jumped from it into Sneck's face. She let go, rolled over and lay still.



## Chapter 12

Tem didn't look back. He stumbled along as fast as he could. He could hear the shouts of the others behind him and had no idea what had happened to Zorin. Then he knew. A tiny lightning bolt hit the ground near his feet. Tem expected a huge explosion, but the bolt just threw a few stones about. Zorin wasn't that powerful then. Tem shouted, "Zorin, Zorin's here. Help!"

He could see the town square ahead. It was full of people going in and out of the taverns, singing and laughing. Tem ran on into the middle of the square, still yelling. The people stopped and looked at him. Then one of Zorin's bolts hit his leg. They may not have been that powerful but the pain was easily enough to knock Tem down.

He rolled over on top of the wand. His leg felt as if it was on fire but he still managed to shout, "Help me, it's Zorin, he wants the wand. Stop him."

Everyone seemed to move at once. Somehow they all knew what to do. One group rushed over and formed a ring round Tem and the rest moved towards Zorin as he entered the square. Zorin stopped and looked around him. He raised his arms as if he was about to throw a huge thunderbolt and then seemed to change his mind.

"A curse on all of you. I'll be back!" he screamed, and with that he wrapped his cloak around him and vanished into thin air.

Some of the town's people helped Tem up. Darvid and Soolin had followed Tem and Zorin to the square. Now they could see Tem was going to be all right they ran back to the Northern Gate.

Sneck lay where they had left her. She was not moving. Darvid and Soolin knelt by her, Soolin put her hand on Sneck's arm.

"Sneck, can you hear me Sneck? Oh, Darvid, do you think she's ..... ?"

Sneck groaned. She moved her head from side to side for a moment then opened her eyes. Soolin and Darvid just watched. After a moment Sneck sat up and spoke. "Sneck hurt, sore, but not bad. Where Tem?"

"Tem's fine," said Soolin. She leant forward and hugged Sneck. "And you're fine. Everything's fine." Sneck was looking better all the time. They all stood up.

"Sneck did her best, where Zorin?"

"Zorin's gone," Darvid told her, "and we still have the wand."

"Then we win, we win!" shouted Sneck with glee.  
"Now Sneck want ..."

"I know what you want Sneck but you will have to get your own donkey, you can't have ours."

"Sneck not want donkey, Sneck want ..... Sneck want ..."

"Well," said Darvid, "what is it you want? We couldn't have done it without you. You can have anything we have as long as it's not the donkey."

"Anything?" asked Sneck.

"Anything," Darvid replied.

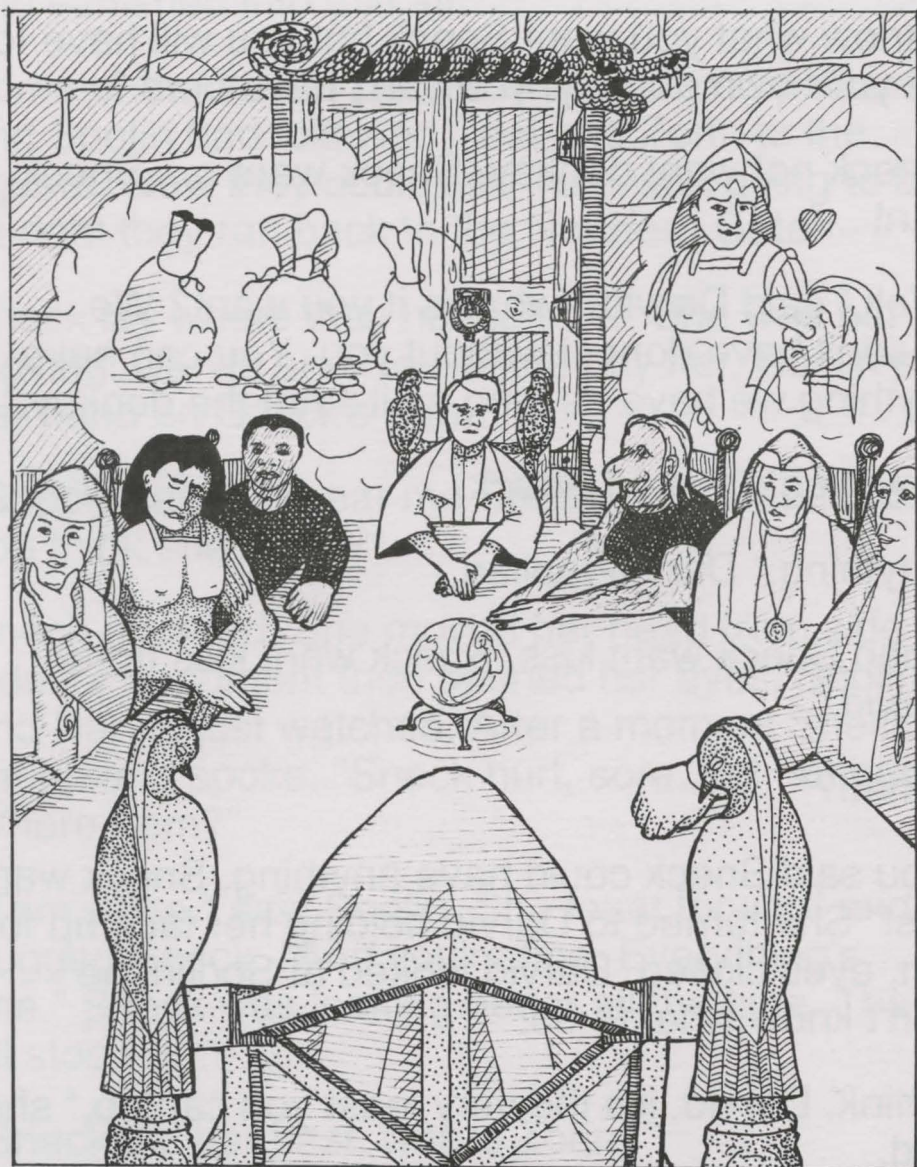
"Then Sneck want kiss. Sneck want kiss from Darvid."

"What!?"

"You said Sneck could have anything, Sneck want kiss!" She turned to Darvid holding her face up for him, eyes closed. Darvid looked at Soolin; he didn't know what to do.

"I think, Darvid, it's the very least you can do," she said.

So he did.



## Chapter 13

That night the four friends slept well at the inn, and in the morning they were taken to the town hall to meet the Council of the Wise. They stood before a table behind which sat twelve people who were the rulers of the town and of all Sellardore. In the centre of the table was the Wand of Command.

An old woman at the centre of the group stood to greet them. "Sit," she said. "I am Eldren, speaker of the Council. We owe you much."

She went on, "For many years we knew that Zorin was still in the land, but without the Wand of Command his power was almost gone. We had long suspected that he had hidden it in the Ork Mines while he was escaping from our army. He used strong magic to stop us getting in."

"So why didn't Zorin just go and get it once you had stopped looking for him?" asked Tem.

"That's simple," replied Eldren, "Zorin is a coward. He had been to the mines once with the power of the wand to protect him. It is a very dangerous place, as you know. He would not have gone alone if there was another way and he did not mind waiting. We think he has sent others before you, but none of them came back."

"Now we have the wand we must guard it. As for you, you have our thanks and we will pay in gold for your help. But first we have a small task for you. This is Andred from the Black River Village, he will tell you about it."

Andred was a younger man, who sat at the end of the table. "Our village needs the waters of the Black River. Without them we can not grow our crops. This morning we woke to find that the river had run dry but we do not know why. Maybe it is some of Zorin's magic, but we do not think he has the power to do such a thing without the wand. We thought you might be able to help."

The four friends looked at each other. They knew why the river had run dry. How could they say no?











